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**ROB BONTA**

*Attorney General*

# Attorney General Bonta Calls on Social Media Companies to Stop the Spread of Disinformation Ahead of 2022 Midterm Elections

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Press Release / *Attorney General Bonta Calls on Social Media Companies to St...*

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**OAKLAND** – California Attorney General Rob Bonta sent a letter to the CEOs of Meta, YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, and Reddit expressing concern about the ongoing spread of disinformation and misinformation through the social media platforms operated by these companies. Disinformation and misinformation pose very real and growing threats to democracy and to the rule of law. While social media companies have taken some steps to combat disinformation and misinformation campaigns, past efforts have proven inadequate, especially given the growing tide of politically motivated violence nationwide. In advance of the upcoming 2022 midterm elections, social media platforms

must take further action – such as enforcement of their content moderation policies and terms of service – to stop the spread of disinformation and misinformation that attack the integrity of our electoral processes.

“As Attorney General, I am charged with protecting Californians’ fundamental right to vote – a right increasingly under threat. The spread of misinformation and disinformation on social media platforms has led to a proliferation of conspiracy theories, political violence, and threats to democracy ahead of the 2022 midterm elections,” **said Attorney General Bonta**. “Just days ago, a man driven by baseless conspiracy theories broke into Speaker Pelosi’s home and violently attacked her husband. This unacceptable act of violence is demonstrative of the growing threat to our elected officials and our democracy. I urge social media companies to learn from past mistakes, and employ their immense resources to stop the dangerous spread of disinformation and misinformation on their platforms.”

Over half of all adults in the U.S. consume at least some of their news via social media platforms. Most U.S. adults also grossly overestimate their ability to distinguish false from legitimate news, and those who most overrate their ability to spot fake news are the most likely to disseminate it. That leaves Americans vulnerable to coordinated disinformation attacks that exploit social and political divisions and undermine trust in our democratic institutions, such as Russia’s brazen interference in the 2016 election. It has also allowed for the widespread dissemination of conspiracies and misinformation that pose real dangers to real people, such as those that deter and disenfranchise voters with false election information, spread hoaxes and debunked conspiracy theories about voter fraud and election results, and foment insurrection and violence against elected officials.

Social media platforms are the primary engines driving the spread of election-related disinformation and misinformation, in spite of efforts to moderate content and remove false information. The January 6, 2021 violent insurrection is now a part of our national

history, and one derived from and deeply connected to hoaxes and conspiracy theories amplified on social media, some of which continue to circulate to this day.

The violence on January 6, 2021 was not an isolated incident; serious threats and violent physical attacks on public officials and their loved ones have been on the rise, fueled by social media that amplifies extremist messaging and perpetuates falsehoods. A chilling example arose just days ago in San Francisco, California, when the husband of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was violently assaulted by an intruder who intended to kidnap and maim the Speaker as a warning to other members of Congress. Prior to the assault, reports note that the attacker had consumed and spread baseless conspiracies concerning, among other things, the 2020 election. Reports earlier this week of Twitter limiting employee access to content moderation tools are also highly concerning.

In the letter, Attorney General Bonta implores the CEOs of Meta, YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, and Reddit to do more to rid their platforms of the dangerous disinformation, misinformation, conspiracy theories, and threats that fuel political violence, spread fear and distrust, and ultimately chill the democratic process.

A copy of the letter is available [here](#).

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